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## Lawmakers expect funds for Highlands

They say aid will come only after struggle

Tuesday, March 08, 2005

**BY LAWRENCE RAGONESE**  
Star-Ledger Staff

The Highlands preservation effort will get federal funding this year but only after some tough wrangling in Congress, especially with Western legislators, Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen and U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine predicted yesterday.

The two lawmakers, honored by environmentalists yesterday for last year's passage of the Highlands Conservation Act, said they are optimistic they can win the battle for Highlands dollars.

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"No one is going to get anything given to them on a silver platter. Every U.S. senator and congressman will be advocating for their projects," said Frelinghuysen (R- 11th Dist.) during a luncheon in Morris Township sponsored by the Highlands Coalition. "But that doesn't mean we can't fight to get the \$10 million and even more."

He and Corzine (D-N.J.) stressed there is no automatic funding even though passage of the Highlands bill designates the 3 million-square-mile area of New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania for up to \$10 million annually over the next 10 years. Those funds would be supplemented by contributions from states, agencies and nonprofit groups.

Frelinghuysen said passage of the bill earmarked the Highlands as a nationally important natural area, which gives it greater standing when funding is considered.

Under the Highlands Conservation Act, signed by President Bush Nov. 30, each of the states is to develop its own priority list of conservation projects to be submitted to the Department of the Interior for possible federal funding.

When the president unveiled his proposed 2006 budget last month, no money was specifically connected to the Highlands Act. That drew some negative responses from the environmental community.

"Without cash, the bill is just symbolic," said Jeff Tittel, executive director of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club.

The Highlands region is filled with forested ridges, hundreds of lakes and streams and reservoirs. It is the habitat of many endangered species, and it supplies drinking water for millions of people. New Jersey's portion of the Highlands is some 800,000 acres in seven northern counties.

About 100 environmental and political leaders from New Jersey and New York honored the two legislators yesterday. Frelinghuysen received a rousing standing ovation.

"Rod pulled off a miracle in getting this bill passed ... especially at a time when the climate for environmental legislation in Washington is not at its apex," said Jim Tripp, chairman of the Highlands Coalition.

Also honored yesterday was Tom Gilbert, former executive director of the Highlands Coalition, and U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg.

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